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Q U E S T I O N,

WHETHER THE READING OF
THE SCRIPTURES BE A
PART OF THE WORSHIP
OF GOD IN CHRISTIAN
CHURCHES?

In a LETTER to a FRIEND.

By a FREE ENQUIRER after Truth.

*He that hath an ear, let him hear, what the Spirit
saith unto the CHURCHES. REV. ii. 29.*

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A. N. S. W. C. R.

TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION

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VERY DEAR FRIEND,

THE Question you propose to me is of such importance as to command my attention, and oblige me to take the first opportunity of writing an answer. There is nothing of more consequence among Christians than the proper use of the *sacred* WORD OF GOD. It is therefore necessary for every one to consider, whether he makes a proper use of this divine blessing, which God hath given him for the advantage of his immortal soul in time and eternity: And whether the use of it in the worship of GOD be not an important end for which it was given to mankind, and a proper mean for promoting the glory of the DIVINE AUTHOR, and the edification of those on whom He hath bestowed so distinguishing—so divine a favour.—This leads me to your Question, *viz.*

Whether the reading of the Scriptures be a part of the public Worship of GOD in christian Churches?

In answer to this Question, I beg leave to suggest the following considerations.

1. The Commandment of GOD is the first and best reason of every religious duty, especially when the commandment is of a *moral* nature: But we find, that no sooner he was pleased to commit any part of his word to writing, than immediately he commanded, as if it had been the very design of writing it, that the written word should be *read*, not only by parents and masters of families, to their children and households, but by those appointed to minister in holy things, *to all the people*,

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when met at their *public worship*. The command to parents is, "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."* The command for public reading the LORD gave to the Priests and Elders, saying, "When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God, in the place which he shall chuse; thou shalt read this law before all Israel, in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and the stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord thy God, and observe to do all the words of his law: and that their children may learn to fear the Lord your God."†

From the *moral* reasons which JEHOVAH hath been pleased to give for the divine exercise of reading his Word in public, it is plain, That so long as it continues to be the duty of people to *fear the Lord*, and *observe* his commandments, just so long will it be the necessary duty of Ministers to *read*, and people to *hear* and *learn* his sacred Word, which is the rule of their faith and duty in all things. We are not to expect the end to be answered, if we neglect the means GOD hath appointed to accomplish it. That both old and young may *hear* and *learn* to *fear the Lord*, is the reason given by GOD for the public reading of his Word, and if any person can assign a better reason, stamp with equal authority, why it should *not* be done, it will then be time to lay aside the duty; but 'till that be done, which never can, it must be peculiar presumption to reason for the neglect, and much more to forbid the performance of a duty, commanded by divine authority, and recommended by the most important

• Deut. vi. 7.

† Ibid, xxxi. 9,—13.

portant usefulness to immortal Souls, with the promise of the divine blessing to attend the faithful discharge of it.

The moral reasons given by **JEHOVAH himself**, might be sufficient to recommend the duty to christians in all ages; (which is surely more than can be said from scripture, for the modern method of preaching, which so many prefer to reading the holy Scriptures,) yet, to illustrate this necessary truth, let me add a few more considerations.

2. The public reading of the Scriptures was of so great consequence to the proper instruction of God's people, that because they could not all attend at Jerusalem so often as was necessary to obtain the desirable end, Synagogues were built in the most convenient parts of the land, and proper ministers were appointed to attend them, for this special purpose, that the people might attend more frequently to receive the sacred instructions. No Synagogue was allowed to be built where there was not a competent number of constant hearers to constitute a public assembly: And the whole of the Synagogue worship was calculated to edify the people by reading and expounding the Scriptures then in writing. There were not less than *three fourths* of the time they were together, spent in this useful exercise, and the prayers and praises on those occasions, were all adapted to this singular part of service, *The reading of the law.*

3. This divine ordinance of reading the Scriptures in public was not limited, like many ceremonies to the Jewish church; for our *divine LORD*, who was the end of the ceremonial law, authorised this part of divine worship by his own countenance and practice. His first public ministration was reading the Scriptures in the Synagogues;* which example is sufficient to

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* Luke iv. 15, 16, 17.

authorise the practice among his disciples to the end of time.

And to shew that this was not merely occasional, after he was ascended into glory, and had sent his Spirit to qualify the Apostles for settling all the forms of worship which should continue in the christian Church, we find, that *they also* gave their public countenance to the reading of the Scriptures in the worshipping assemblies.† And when they wrote epistles, they commanded them to be read in the Churches to which they were sent; and also those epistles that were sent to other Churches,‡ such epistles, being all that was then written of the New Testament. Thus we have the countenance and authority of Christ and his Apostles, for the public reading of as much of both Testaments as was then in writing; more could not be read.— But it must certainly be a weak, if not a worse reason for not reading them now, because they are complete— Rather it is a strong argument why they should be more frequently read, that we may sooner come to a competent knowledge of the whole.

4. However misinterpreted, or little regarded, to me it appears most evident, That a part of the Apostle *Paul's* instructions to Timothy, amounts to a positive command to him and all Ministers of the Gospel, to read the Scriptures in the Churches. When he gave him a system of ministerial duties which he was to exercise in the Church, he sums up what he should do to the people in this command,—“ Give attendance “ to READING, to *exhortation*, to *doctrine*.”§— Here READING is one of three public duties to which

† *Acts* xiii. 14, 15. *Chap.* xv. 21

‡ *Col.* iv. 16.

§ *1 Tim.* iv. 13.

which he was to attend—And a sufficient warrant for all ministers to follow the example.—Criticism itself cannot separate these three duties; and if the *reading* shall be confined to the closet, the *exhortation* and *doctrine* must go there too, but with what propriety, let christians—let common sense judge.

5. Divine wisdom points out this use of the Scriptures in the Churches, by the manner in which they are composed,—and the objects to whom they are directed.—The whole is composed for the general edification of mankind in what most concerns them.—They are GOD'S LETTERS to *mankind*, and should be published to all in every country where HE in his good providence is pleased to send them. Wherever HE intends a Church, HE sends his word to gather the members of it out of the world; and being gathered, the Scriptures are still to be published as the LORD'S LESSONS of faith and practice to his *children*; and he that hath the sanctified ear, will hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches.—N. B. The Spirit in the Scriptures speaks to the CHURCHES: But how shall they hear, if they are never read to them *as Churches*? Reading to individuals, is the Spirit speaking to these individuals; and reading to the Churches, is the Spirit speaking to the Churches. If the Spirit speaks in the Scriptures to Churches, it is certainly their duty to hear *as Churches*. what he says: But that he speaks to Churches is evident; for not to mention in general, that the Gospels, and other parts were intentionally written for the instruction of Churches; most of the Epistles in the New Testament were directed in a particular manner to Churches, and ordered to be read in them: and no doubt all the lovers of Christ were delighted to hear what the Spirit

Spirit said concerning him: But the reason of not desiring to *hear*, is the want of the spiritual *ear*—and a just ground of suspicion to those immediately concerned, that the heart remains unsanctified by the Spirit of Christ.—But this leads me to another reason why the Scriptures should be publicly read to the people.

6. Because in the *Scriptures alone*, GOD speaks *directly* to both *Saints* and *Sinners*.—Mercies and judgments in providence, are the voice of GOD by such instruments as He is pleased to employ,—and preaching may be called the voice of GOD so far as it is agreeable to his will;—But *Revelation* is GOD *himself* speaking to the Conscience; and as it is by this mean that HE gathers sinners to Himself, as well as comforts and strengthens his saints, where can it be more profitably published, than in public assemblies met to worship God, where persons of both denominations attend, who may be profited by it, as GOD is pleased to bless it for their spiritual advantage, by suiting it to their various states and circumstances.

Those who prefer preaching to the reading of GOD's *word*, which I am afraid, for want of proper attention to the very wide difference betwixt them, far too many do, are like the *Israelites* whose hearts were not right with GOD, who, when GOD spoke from Mount Sinai, cried out, "Let not GOD speak to us, but let *Moses* speak to us."—But every gracious soul will rejoice to hear GOD's *own voice* from *Revelation itself*, and will say with delight, "We will hear what GOD the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people.

These who do not like to hear the Scriptures read in worship, should seriously consider, what a daring
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affront they offer to the all gracious and good GOD—what a dishonour they put upon HIM by the contempt of His *sacred Word*!—What greater mark of disesteem can there be, than to despise a person's discourse, and not think his speech to us, worthy of our notice? especially when he addresses us with very great seriousness, and with the greatest affection, for no interest to himself, but wholly for our good. In the Bible, the GOD of glory speaks to his creatures;—He speaks with the most persuasive energy, and with all the yearnings of parental tenderness and affection. From no other quarter, but from the sacred volume, can we hear any thing, that can be ushered in with a **THUS SAITH THE LORD**. We ought therefore to hear with reverence, attention, and delight; and rejoice with filial fear, when we hear the voice of JEHOVAH speaking directly to us from *His divine Word*.

7. The manifold uses and ends of Revelation, all shew that it should be published to the people in the worshiping assemblies, where GOD hath promised to be present to bless it for the sacred purposes for which it is designed. I dare not attempt to shew the numberless and invaluable uses and ends of Revelation—This would be presumption indeed!—But please to take a summary of them in the Apostle's words, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for DOCTRINE, for REPROOF, for CORRECTION, for INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: That the man of GOD may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" One would be apt to think, that it would need no more to give sanction to the use of the scriptures in public worship, than this comprehensive character that the inspired penman gives to them, every part of which, strongly pleads the necessity of using them in public, to answer the great ends

ends they are calculated to promote. *For Doctrine*—to declare and establish religious truths ;—*for Reproof*—to convince of sin, and to refute error ;—*for Correction*—or renovation of the heart, and reformation of the life ;—*for instruction in Righteousness*—in that *righteousness* which could never have been learned from any other book, and in which *alone* sinful men may appear with comfort and safety before GOD.

THE BIBLE is the Church's Charter given by GOD, and sealed with the Blood of CHRIST, wherein is written all the laws, regulations, gifts, grants, promises, privileges, &c. belonging to christian Churches.—To them it is a rich magazine of all spiritual comforts, under their various circumstances in this world of sorrow,—a divinely furnished dispensary of all precious and sovereign remedies, for every disease that may afflict them,—an open store-house of all necessary blessings to supply their needs,—a complete armory of well tried spiritual weapons, to defend them from their declared enemies, the Devil, the World, and the Flesh,—an unerring compass, to guide them in their passage to the peaceful haven of immortal glory. Of what unspeakable advantage would it be for Churches to be properly acquainted with the blessed contents of this sacred volume, which contains all that is interesting to them in time and eternity !

8. The purposes for which the Scriptures have been read in public, and the good effects they have had, are convincing arguments for the utility of the practice.—GOD *himself* was pleased to give reasons, pregnant with divine advantages, why that part of his word which he commanded to be written, should be read to all the people. And now when the Scriptures are complete, what gracious purposes might be accomplished

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plished by publishing the character of the divine SAVI-
OUR, and salvation in him, to promiscuous assemblies of
faints and sinners?—As the conversion of sinners is a
work of GOD, it is more likely he will bless his *own*
word for that gracious purpose, than other means of
any kind; especially as it is divinely calculated for this
end. “The *Law* of the LORD is perfect, convert-
“ing the soul: the *Testimony* of the LORD is sure,
“making wise the simple *.”

Not to mention the many remarkable effects it has
had in different parts of the world since Revelation was
complete, we have several instances in Scripture, of
the reading such parts as were in writing being attend-
ed with remarkable consequences. No sooner did the
Israelites withdraw their attention from the law, than
GOD left them to fall into idolatry, and the hands of
their enemies: But the reading of the law was the
means of their conviction and reformation.—*Josiah*
trembled, and began reformation by reading the *Law*
to him.—*Jehoshaphat* carried on his reformation by
sending men to publish the law to the people.—*Ezra*
and *Nehemiah* reformed the captives returned from
Babylon, and taught them their duty by the public
reading of the *Law*. And so attentive they were to
this duty, that they spent a third part of their worship-
ing days in *reading*, which could not be less than *three*
hours.—yet some think it too much to spend a *quarter*
of an hour in reading the Scriptures, though they are
now complete!—What way did our divine SAVI-
OUR begin his ministry, and open his commission?—By
reading a passage of Scripture, and applying it to him-
self.—What is the sum of all the Apostle’s sermons?—
Just the publishing a part of the Old Testament, and
applying

* *Psa.* xix. 7, &c.

applying it to the circumstances of the New. Whether they read or repeated the passages, it was the same to their hearers, and is the same in this argument.—It is certain, this was the way by which *Peter* and *Paul* converted thousands. *GOD* very seldom blesses other means for converting sinners than his own *divine Word*,—which is the hammer that breaks the flinty heart—quicker than a two edged sword to pierce the obdurate soul—sweeter than honey to the sanctified taste—and more precious than much fine gold to the enlightened mind; consequently, the reading of the sacred word is pregnant with divine blessings and privileges to both saints and sinners.

But lest any should imagine, that the practice of reading the Scriptures in public worship was laid aside when they were compleated, to the above considerations taken from the Scriptures, I shall add one more.

9. That ancient Christian Churches, and all modern reformed Churches, whether more general or particular, have made the reading of the Scriptures a part of their public worship. That the ancient Christians did so, is evident from all the Church histories of those times, and all the apologies that were made for them. Such a reverence they had for Revelation, that they used it in the morning, at meals, and before they went to bed. In times of persecution, they never failed to spend the most part of their time at meetings for worship, in reading the Scriptures. This practice they took from the Apostles themselves, as is clear from the Apostolic institutions. And rather than fail in this part, they generally appointed two lessons from the Old Testament, and two from the New at least, to be read at every meeting. This practice continued 'till *Popery* rendered the use of the Scriptures unnecessary,

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unnecessary, and superseded them to make room for the human institutions which were placed in their stead; for they could not be both used in worship, with any degree of propriety.

But it is beyond contradiction, that those particular Churches that retained the truth, continued to use the Scriptures in their public worship. And it is a fact which none will deny, that no sooner reformation from Popery took place in any country, than the first thing the Reformers did, was to publish the Scriptures to the people by all possible means, and especially by the use of them in their public worship: yea copies of them were fixed in the places of public worship, that all who came might have the free use of them. Wherever a reformed church has been, there the reading of the Scriptures was a part of public worship. In the Protestant Churches in France, Germany, and it's neighbouring countries, Switzerland, Geneva, Holland, England, Scotland, &c. this practice has been invariably admitted among the rules of their public worship. The Westminster Assembly particularly say in their directory for worship, "*That the WORD READ, though there follow no immediate explanation of what is READ,—is one of the ORDINANCES in particular Congregations.*" This is as explicit as words can make it.

It has, and will be found a *maxim*, That Popery, and the public use of the Scriptures, like irreconcilable enemies, have alternatively banished each other, according as the one or the other was countenanced by the people. And I am persuaded, that the Devil could not contrive a better and more certain method of introducing Popery into any place, than first to get the public use of the Scriptures laid aside among professed worshippers. And such as oppose the use of them

will consider, whether they are not taking the most effectual method of introducing Popery or infidelity into the land. For want of this privilege the Jews were often led into idolatry; but after the captivity, when they diligently observed this ordinance, they were never more in danger of falling into that sin.

It will be very difficult to assign any other reason for such a remarkable change of disposition in that people, who before, were so prone to idolatry, and after, were even superstitiously cautious against it, than the reading of the law and the prophets so frequently to them in their synagogues. By the want of it, ignorance abounded, the knowledge of God and his law was forgotten, consequently they were easily drawn into the idolatrous usages of neighbouring nations.— But being properly taught their duty, and excited by the strongest motives to obedience, at least every sabbath, by hearing what God had written for their instruction, their zeal against idolatry was never allowed to cool. Hence our Saviour rather blames them for *transgressing*, or going beyond the bounds, by adding traditions to the law, than not observing what was written. As by this method the Jewish religion was then preserved, by the same was Christianity propagated at first, and has been preserved to us:—It has withstood all the artifices and cruelties which Hell and Heathenism could devise to suppress it. Even *Julius the Apostate* was so sensible of this, that after all other means to restore heathenism were rendered abortive, by the constant publication of revealed truth in Christian assemblies, as his last effort, he thought of causing philosophers to publish the heathen doctrines to the people, in the same manner as the ministers did the christian religion. But he was taken off before the execution

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execution of this promising, but devilish device.——
 However, it is certain, that the want of conformity, in many particular Churches, to the Scripture rules for regulating their conduct,—the want of zeal in the public worship and service of G O D, too visible in every quarter,—the manifold disorders which abound among professing Christian Members,—and the great want of christian unity, love, and fellowship among them, may be justly attributed to the neglect of a regular and proper use of the Scriptures, which divine Wisdom and Goodness have wisely calculated to correct such abuses, and promote every social christian Duty.

And now, my dear Sir, review, with serious attention review, the evidence in these brief hints, and judge for yourself as in the sight of G O D, whose sacred word is recommended for public use by christian Societies in their worship.—The *moral reasons* given by J E H O V A H, which, like himself, are holy and unalterable in their nature, while there are old or young to H E A R, and L E A R N to *fear the LORD*,—The great consequence of this duty among G O D's People, and the peculiar attention paid to the performance of it in the synagogues, at least every sabbath.—The example of our divine L O R D and his Apostles in the New Testament, who attended upon, countenanced, and practised the duty of reading the Scriptures in the worshiping assemblies.—The particular apostolic injunction to Timothy as a minister of the gospel, to attend to *reading, exhortation, and doctrine*.—The manner in which unerring wisdom, unbounded goodness, and divine mercy have composed the Scriptures, so surprisingly suited to saints and sinners, for whose use they were designedly written.—The express invitation or commandment of the ascended King of the Church, to *hear what the SPIRIT in the Scriptures saith to the*

CHURCHES.—The scope of the apostolic epistles, the intention of their being written to **CHURCHES.**—The *Scriptures* alone being the *voice* of **GOD**, or **GOD** himself speaking to the consciences of both saints and sinners, *they*, of all other means, must be most effectual to answer the purposes of conviction and edification,—and what an affront it must be to divine majesty to neglect to *hear* **HIS VOICE**, or prefer any other thing to *it*?—The inestimable uses, and gracious ends of Revelation, all so admirably suited to every use, to every circumstance that individuals or churches can be in 'till the great drama is finished.—The promise of **GOD**'s presence to bless his own institutions,—and the special interest which *Churches* have in these sacred records, as their rule of faith and practice here, and their conducting, supporting, and comforting guide to glory.—The purposes for which this duty has been performed, and the blessed effect it has had upon erring individuals,—a preservation from idolatry, to the Jews,—a happy mean of converting thousands to the christian faith,—propagating christianity,—preserving the truth in Churches amidst popish darkness,—carrying forward the reformation from popery,—and the only practice among protestants that can effectually hinder the increase of popery and infidelity among them.—And if you please, you may add the practice of Churches ancient and modern (popish ones excepted) which have admitted this as a part of their public worship,—and the visible advance of error, and decline of true godliness, where this sacred institution has been despised or neglected.

If these, and such like considerations have no weight to make people attend to this special christian duty, it may be asked, Where is our religion, when the foundation of all its doctrines and duties is so much neglected

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ed in worshipping assemblies? Is not this the design and use of that Revelation with which GOD blessed the world,—that hereby we should know the certainty of those things, wherein we are instructed,—be made wise into salvation,—and by the promised Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, be guided into all truth?—Is this our kindness to our divine LORD, and best Friend, to treat the Revelation he hath given us with indifference? Is this the influence which the unspeakable love of GOD, and the tender compassions of a suffering, dying Saviour have upon us, who expired in death to give testimony to the truth, and bring us from darkness to light? Is this the entertainment we give to the most important truths, surrounded with ineffable wisdom, the result of divine councils,—which are the wonder and delight of exalted angels and saints,—furnish matter for eternal contemplation in glory,—and the unwearied songs of adoring seraphs? Are they the glorious truths to which CHRIST bore witness, sealed with his precious blood, the subject of so much affection, wonder and esteem in heaven, and shall they be neglected and undervalued upon earth, by *men*, for whose salvation and happiness they were designed, to whom they bring life and immortality to light, and open such an amazing scene of triumphing love, unutterable mercy, and victorious grace?

When the *Word of GOD* meets with so much neglect or contempt, it is the duty of all who love their Saviour, to embrace every opportunity of declaring their unblushing regard to him as their only LORD, and their esteem for *his adorable Revelation*, and by a vigorous zeal for its honour, shew with what affection the pure light of it is received in their souls, and how highly they prize the glory of their Redeemer. By this they will shew themselves to be faithful servants of

CHRIST, and give obedience to the injunctions of our holy Religion, *To contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints—To hold fast the form of sound words, which we have heard in faith and love which is in CHRIST JESUS.*

The common objections to the practice of this ordinance are so frivolous, that they justly merit the contempt of every christian. But lest the objectors should be vain, and glory in what is their shame, I shall notice the strongest of them: and that which challenges the first place is, “*That people may read the Scriptures at home.*”

Whatever strength is in this objection, it will equally hold against praying and praising in public;—*People can do these at home.*—But I have always observed, that such as are most indifferent about the parts of public worship, are most careless about them in private. He who makes conscience of his duty in private, will love and desire to attend it in public. Pray ask this objector, Does he duly observe to worship GOD in his family? If he does not,—we need not wonder that he disregards *public* worship. If he does.—is it in the christian manner, by reading, praying, and praising,? If he makes the reading of the Scriptures a part of the worship of GOD in *private*, why reject it in *public*? If he curtails his private devotion, by excluding Revelation from it, be not surpris'd at his indifference about public worship.—But when has he a more proper time for reading the scriptures?—To be sure, when an hour can be well spared from more necessary affairs, as an amusement to himself.—Alas! it may be supposed with great probability, that far too many attend public worship from no higher motives than amusement, curiosity, itching ears, &c.

But though I were to grant, that some make so good
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use of their Bible at home, as to see no need **THEY** have of hearing it in public ; yet these, if they understand what they read, will do nothing, nor desire that any thing should be done, to hinder the spiritual comfort and edification of **GOD'S** children,—or what may lead to convince, convert, and reclaim sinners from the evil of their ways ; for both which gracious purposes, the word of **GOD** is divinely calculated ; and the only mean by which it can best answer these general ends, is the publishing or reading it in assemblies where people of both denominations are supposed to be present. Because I can reap no benefit from a good thing myself, why should I hinder others from receiving advantage of so much consequence to their immortal souls ? With regard to saints, it must be robbing them of what they most delight in,—hearing the voice of their **GOD** and **SAVIOUR** speaking to them in his own word, which, to them, is of more value than all the oratory of angels and men.—With respect to sinners, it is taking from them the means which **GOD** ordinarily blesses for gathering them into his kingdom. To keep the use of the Bible in public from them, is the same to them as if they were debarred from attending the public worship, which every one must conclude would be cruel indeed.—No man ever was, nor is it possible to be too well acquainted with the Bible,—but it is a most lamentable truth, and a gross reproach upon Christianity, that so many thousands live ignorant of the saving truths contained in the Bible. They criminally neglect the use of the Scriptures in private, and they have no opportunity of hearing them read in public, (for which others than they will have to account) consequently they live and die in ignorance,—the most dangerous darkness, while the divine light hath been shining around them ! The fate of such poor souls, is
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of itself sufficient, to make every tender heart melt, and zealously endeavour to have them informed by all possible means, of which, the reading of the Scriptures to them in public, is certainly one, and such a one as G O D hath often graciously blessed for the most salutary purposes.

There is another objection that some Dissenters make, which, for their sakes, I am almost ashamed to mention, viz. "*Because the Scriptures are read in the Church of England worship, therefore they would not have them read in their Meeting-houses.*"—This shews criminal prejudice, as well as inexcusable ignorance, and in the persons too who say they can read them at home ! But if they did so, and understood what they read, they would never talk of neglecting a positive duty because some, whom they do not love, practise it. Such persons, I suppose, would not chuse to go to heaven, if church-men came there !—Why do not they, for the same reason, reject praying and praising because churchmen are *guilty of such errors* * !—Though the Devil said *it is written*, and cited Scripture too, our blessed Saviour did not lay aside the expression, nor the practice of citing Scripture † —Such prejudice,—such ignorance shew they know nothing of revealed truth, which, out of pity to their souls, should be read in their hearing, perhaps, it may be the the blessed mean of opening their eyes, and saving them from such fatal destruction as their ignorance will

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* Whatever faults may be in the form of the Church of England worship. I am certain this is none of them. It is rather a glory in their worship that so much of revelation is constantly used in it.

† I hope none will imagine, that I mean any personal comparison here.

inevitably hurry them to, if the mercy of GOD prevent not.

The last objection I shall mention is, *That it leaves too little time for the minister's sermon or lecture,—and that they do it on purpose to consume the time, that their sermons may be shorter.*—This objection is of the same complexion with the former, it shews great weakness,—and the latter part evidently proceeds from a bad heart, possessed by a principle of censoriousness and rash judging, inconsistent with the meek spirit of a Christian, endowed with the charity that thinketh no evil.—Were ministers to introduce arbitrarily, any practice that is without countenance in Scripture, or something of less consequence than the product of their own study, there might be, perhaps, some ground for such a conjecture, that they wanted to consume time: But I would have a very favourable opinion of that minister who would prefer publishing the truth in revelation, as more likely to promote the glory of his master, whose testimony it is, and the edification of those to whom GOD hath sent it, to any thing that he could prepare by every effort of human invention.—On the other hand, I would find it difficult to give a proper excuse for the minister, who had a higher esteem for his own productions as means to promote the glory of GOD, and the edification of his people, than for the sacred volume which divine wisdom composed for these invaluable purposes.—I know not what may be the designs of some *Ministers* in setting aside the use of the Scriptures in public worship, to make room for the fruits of their own studies: but I am certain, that it was not the design of the MINISTRY which CHRIST appointed for the edifying of his body the CHURCH.

Would not any Christian shudder at hearing it asserted

ed, *That the Bible is of no more public use than to be a text book to the Clergy in their studies.*—But what less can be concluded from the very little use made of it in many places of public worship? where no more is read than a detached verse, or a clause of a verse, as a text from which the minister intends to speak. And even this is an unnecessary formality; for if the sermon be read, the text is at the head of the scroll; if it is not read, the text may be given without book as well as the sermon,—consequently there is no use for a Bible being ever seen in such places of worship! I need not expose such unchristian like conduct, the bare mentioning it is enough to make every professing christian blush. Here it may be asked, Which way went the spirit of the LORD from the ordinance of reading the Scriptnres in public worship, to compositions of human skill and industry?—Such visible disrespect to the sacred records of heaven calls for the deepest regrave, and demands the most speedy amendment; till this takes place, it is as unreasonable to expect the divine blessing will attend any thing that is put in their room, to profit people in spiritual knowledge and growth of grace, as to expect the *streams* will flow when the *fountain* is cut off.

Any other objection that is made, is, if possible, of less consequence than these mentioned. I shall, therefore, upon the whole, make this general remark,—That to me, it seems very surprising, that a positive duty, so pregnant with spiritual privileges, against which nothing can be advanced, but what flows from ignorance or prejudice, should not be practised in every place of worship. Ministers who neglect this part of their duty must not reckon themselves under the obligations laid upon *Timothy*, to give attendance to **READING, to exhortation, to doctrine.** They are equally

equally the duty of every minister,—And more success might be promised against the kingdom of Satan, were the weapons of GOD's appointing more used, viz. The sword of the Spirit, which is the *Word of GOD*,—all other will be ineffectual, while this is despised and rejected.

I know some very respectable Dissenting Ministers have been spoken to on this subject, who freely approved of the duty here recommended, and would willingly put it in practice, BUT——BUT what?—many of our brethren do it not.—No.—This reason is every way so weak, that men of judgment and character will certainly not mention it.—BUT—our worldly interest may be hurt.—This cannot possibly be the reason.—No minister, I am certain no honest one, will neglect his duty, for any pecuniary advantage whatsoever.—BUT—it may give OFFENCE.—Most certainly —The Devil will be enraged,—and perhaps some may be angry for such reasons as are before mentioned :—yea, they may leave their congregations also.—*But*, can any congregation of Christians be the worse by wanting such people?—In nothing but the loss of what they, *perhaps*, contributed to the civil interest, which GOD will otherwise provide.

The best things that ever was published in a sinful world have always given offence.—The humble and holy life, heavenly doctrine, beneficent, godlike miracles, meritorious death, triumphant resurrection, glorious exaltation, of the blessed JESUS,—in short, the whole plan of salvation by CHRIST, published in the gospel by inspired apostles,—all and every part of it gave offence,—was to the devout self-righteous JEWS a stumbling-block, and to the wise and learned Greeks, foolishness;—*But unto them who were called*, among both Jews and Greeks. CHRIST the power of GOD, and the wisdom of GOD. 1 Cor. i. 18,—25. The same truths are now to be read which the apostles preached, and will meet with the same reception among those who are of *this world* to the end of time. The same antipathies still remain to the knowledge of divine truth. But *who* will be offended? The moral complexion of the offended party is no bad mark of the goodness or badness of a cause. And in such cases of offence as the present, the character of the offended should

should be impartially considered, when it will be found a truth beyond dispute, That to hate, or be *offended* at glorifying GOD by publishing his sacred word for the benefit of saints and sinners, *is none of the spots of GOD's Children.*

If any minister shall prefer his worldly advantage to the glory of his master, and the edification of his people, and reserve himself to fish in the troubled waters, by opening a sanctuary for the reception of haters of the Bible (this is not too hard a character for such as fly from hearing it read as from some hateful thing)—envy not the suitable connection—such pastor such flock,—Pray, let us not grudge that temporal plenty and prosperity which runs in such a channel, more than we would the way that GOD makes the sun to shine, and the rain to fall.—Rather let us sincerely pray for them, pity and lament their dangerous infatuation, and the want of the presence and blessing of the great Shepherd,—who owns none for his sheep but such as *hear HIS voice.*

Let faithful ministers do their duty, notwithstanding prejudices which come from no good quarter, and leave the event to GOD, who will bless that *word* which he magnifies above his name, and make it answer all the purposes for which he sends it to any people. As for such as will not, I humbly advise them, to provide better reasons for this neglect, than any I have yet heard; for I am afraid they will not avail them when an account is taken of all our conduct by HIM who knows the principles of action, and the importance of his own commands.

There are several other considerations concerning this subject which have occurred in writing the above, but as you may perhaps communicate the contents of this to some of your most candid neighbouring ministers, the result of which, I hope you will favour me with, I shall reserve them, with the fate of this epistle, for the substance of another letter. In the mean time believe me to be your affectionate friend, and a hearty wellwisher to the success of revealed truth, for the glory of our Divine Redeemer, and the spiritual edification of all the vessels of mercy.

A FREE INQUIRER AFTER TRUTH.

OCT. 29th. 1782.

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